

ACCESS FOR EVERYONE

A California committee helps make sure that wastewater agencies of all sizes get quality training in collection system operation and maintenance

By Jim Aanderud



The Southern Sections Collection Systems Committee: from left, Duane Johnson, Dave Badgley, David Aznar, Rick Lewis, Bev Stumman, Joe Flores, James Gusman, Jim Aanderud, Mark Chamberlin and Denis Pollak. (Photo by George Solano)

Focused goals and long-term commitments have helped wastewater departments throughout California experience success. Their achievements relate directly to knowledge and the ability to disseminate it, mostly through training.

A group in Southern California has helped foster quality collection system training over the past 17 years. This group, the Southern Sections Collection Systems Committee (SSCSC) of the California Water Environment Association (CWEA), provides an example for other state and regional industry associations to follow.

In 1991, a group of collection managers from around Southern California met to discuss their training needs. The exchange addressed inequities in training between large, medium and small agencies. "We found that large agencies had vast resources, while medium and small agencies lacked those resources, but often had valuable experience to share," recalls past CWEA president and current SSCSC chairman Denis Pollak.

The idea emerged that agencies

of every size should have the same access to training. The SSCSC grew out of that idea. Working within the CWEA, it offers training specifically for collection system personnel across all of Southern California.

Getting certified

The CWEA, with seven of its 17 sections located in the southern part of the state, serves some 8,500 wastewater professional members with conferences, training, awards and publications.

Its most important function is a certification program for collection system maintenance, wastewater treatment plant maintenance, laboratory analysis, biosolids land application, environmental compliance inspection, and industrial treatment plant operations. There are four certification grade levels (I through IV) for each discipline.

CWEA administers the certification program by providing monthly computer-based testing. A professional who achieves certification must maintain it by getting at least 12 contact hours of training in his or her discipline every two years.

That is where the SSCSC comes

into play. The committee meets the training needs of collection personnel with at least three workshops per year. "We pretty much have workshops down to a science," says Rick Lewis, a past chairman. "Our database of knowledgeable speakers covers most any topic in the collections field."

Mark Chamberlin, a past chairman, adds, "We were not satisfied with just fulfilling the contact hour requirements. We wanted to provide quality education that keeps our members on the cutting edge

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of new technology and best practices." In fact, speakers must follow strict rules, and their abstracts are thoroughly checked out in advance to ensure that the presentations are generic and not "sales pitches."

Enjoyable, productive

SSCSC makes every effort to provide an enjoyable and productive environment. "Our city, like many others, sees the workshops as the cream of the crop," says SSCSC treasurer James Gusman. "In fact, our employees are eager to attend."

The committee has helped a number of local sections initiate their own collection system training programs. For example, the

committee helped the Colorado River Basin Section (CORBS) with a hands-on collections training workshop in 2007.

"Having worked side by side with our committee, CORBS was able to hold their own workshop the following year," says Duane Johnson, SSCSC co-chairman. "It was such a success that they plan on continuing the tradition for the foreseeable future."

SSCSC has also provided hundreds of hours of collections training at the Tri-State Seminar in Primm, Nev. This annual event is sponsored by CWEA, the Nevada WEA and the Arizona Water & Pollution Control Association.

In 2009, for the third straight year, the committee will offer a complete six-hour collection system class on Education Day, Feb. 25, at

the 29th Annual Pumper & Cleaner Environmental Expo International in Louisville, Ky.

Planning for workshops

SSCSC meetings are held monthly around Southern California, some at members' agencies or offices, others at future workshop venues. The primary focal points of each meeting are the upcoming workshops.

The planning of a workshop begins with a discussion of topics. Topic selection is driven by current issues in the workplace and feedback from various agencies. Of course, the staple topics of safety and operations are covered regu-

larly. The SSCSC has three types of collection workshops:

- General workshops that cover general collection topics
- Specialty workshops that focus on one subject, such as approaches to pipeline rehabilitation
- Technical certification program workshops that prepare collection personnel for testing in specific areas.

The topics often dictate the workshop locations, and so can the size of the classroom facility. A key consideration is space where vendors can set up displays. Ideally, the exhibit space is near the lunch area, as that encourages interaction between vendors and attendees.

From time to time, the committee offers hands-on workshops where an instructor teaches from a particular piece of equipment. In this case, there must be an outdoor area that accommodates the equipment and the class.

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The SSCSC has created a checklist that ensures that each workshop is thoroughly planned. As the workshop date approaches, communication among committee members increases. Final details are worked out, and adjustments are made. Up to the day of the workshop, the committee tracks the number of registered attendees. If the count is low, members contact their peers at other agencies in order to encourage them to sign up.

On the day of the workshop, committee members arrive at 6:30 a.m. to prepare for the arrival of attendees and vendors. One committee member is responsible for organizing the vendors.

Tables and chairs should have been delivered the day before, and the committee begins setting up a

istration packets, enjoy a continental breakfast, and talk to vendors.

Vendor relations

Vendors are a big part of an SSCSC workshop: They pay the lion's share of the cost, and they impart important information to the attendees. In fact, the committee refers to exhibit time as "vendor training." Between morning and lunchtime, the vendors have three hours of exposure to the attendees.

Vendors know these workshops are a good value. Even with an attendance of fewer than 100, they will have quality time with employees from 20 or more agencies. That value far exceeds their cost of participation.

Once the classes begin, the attendees are directed to the classroom, where a moderator welcomes them, lays down the ground rules for the day, and introduces the speakers. Each class is limited to just under one hour, meeting the time require-

Some vendors donate T-shirts and hats, while others purchase items such as flashlights and pocketknives to which they affix their business cards. The committee also commits a few hundred dollars to purchasing top prizes like tool kits and DVD players.

At the end of the day, everyone leaves happy. The attendees have fulfilled a significant part of their contact-hour requirements, and SSCSC committee members have completed another successful workshop.

Looking to the future

Each year, supervisors and superintendents look at their employees' training needs and consider where to send them to keep their contact hours current. With this in mind, the SSCSC schedules annual workshops in three counties. That means hundreds of cities and agencies can schedule training far in advance.

The SSCSC holds an annual workshop in Riverside County or San Bernardino County each spring. The 2009 workshop is at the City of Riverside. An annual Orange County workshop is held each summer: It is close to the ocean, where the weather is cool. The 2009 session is at Irvine Ranch Water District in Irvine. The fall workshops are held in San Diego County.

A workshop subcommittee has been formed for each workshop. This changed the landscape of the committee, taking the bulk of the work off of a few members and spreading it out among many. Each subcommittee is responsible for workshops in their local county. This limits the commitment to three months each year.

As this workshop system matures, the SSCSC hopes to expand the annual workshop commitment to other areas around Southern California. The committee continues to meet monthly as it forges ahead with new plans and new ideas that raise the bar in collection system training.

There are few people willing to give of their time and energy for the betterment of the industry. But those who do should know their sacrifice makes a difference.

Jim Aanderud is owner of Innerline Engineering, a video pipeline inspection company based in Corona, Calif. ♦



Rick Lewis teaches nozzle technology at an SSCSC workshop. (Photo by Jim Aanderud)

Finally, the chosen site must have enough parking. Since most workshops are held at agency facilities, planners also must consider the effect on the agency's operations.

Handling the logistics

After identifying a location the committee often schedules a future meeting there to look it over and fine tune the planning. Workshop planning and execution are most effective when a single party is in charge. The SSCSC des-

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